

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Tuesday, January 17, 2012

Alexandria City Hall

Members:

Present: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation,
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Arthur Fox, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat lease holder
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business and Professional Association
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen and Chair
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC)
Peter Pennington, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)
Stephen Thayer, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.
Van Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association

Excused: Engin Artemel, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council

City Staff: Jack Browand, Acting Deputy Director, Parks Operations, Department of
Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Jim Hixon, Dockmaster, RPCA
Cheryl Lawrence, Acting Division Chief, RPCA
Lt. Juan Torres, Alexandria Police Department (APD)
Nancy Williams, Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z)

Guests: Susan Cohen, Public Art Committee
Harry Harrington, Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC)
Steve Muddy

Welcome and Introductions

The Committee was called to order at 7:30 a.m. and members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes from November 29, 2011 and December 20, 2011 Meetings

Moved by Pennington, seconded by Manor, to approve the summary minutes of the November 29, 2011 meeting as drafted. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Moved by Pennington, seconded by Manor, to approve the summary minutes of the December 20, 2011 meeting as drafted. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Report from Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Marina Pilings

Browand reported that agency approvals have been received and preparatory actions for replacing and/or repairing the nine pilings are proceeding. Installation is expected by the end of March, prior to the start of the boating season. Work on the pilings is not expected to conflict with the late winter shad run. City actions related to the Minnie V continue, including discussions of docking options and the license agreement.

Marina Fees

Browand reported that staff has reviewed the Marina's fee schedule to create a predictable and consistent structure that would include a new category for short-term visits to the Marina by historic and educational vessels. There currently is no fee category that covers the full range of possible historic vessel visits. The goal is to attract more short-term visits to the Marina by historic vessels, an objective endorsed both by the Committee and the Waterfront Plan Work Group. A one-year trial period to test the new category's effectiveness is anticipated.

Browand said this new "historic vessel" category would not cover the Minnie V's anticipated long-term docking at the Marina. The proposed "historic vessel" category would cover short-term visits by vessels such as the Godspeed, the Sequoia and Pride of Baltimore. One of the options being considered by the City for the Minnie V's docking includes treating the Minnie V on a pilot basis, similar to the first season of excursion boats to Nationals baseball games. Generally when a vessel plans to stay longer than four days and has requested a fee waiver, staff submits the request to the Committee, then to Council and the process can take as long as two to three months. The new fee structure would include a fee category for historic vessels for short-term Marina visits greater than four days, and would give the dock master administrative decision-making authority.

Browand said the specifics are not yet available regarding how the new fee schedule would compare to the current Marina fees paid by commercial vessels under their annual license agreements.

Staff is seeking advice regarding the policy without reference to a specific pricing structure but instead, for example, whether a flat rate or other fee structure should be used.

In response to a Macek question, Browand confirmed that the category would include reconstructed and educational vessels. After discussion it was agreed that staff would revise the proposal to reflect that educational vessels that might not be historic would also be covered by this new category since the City wishes to attract both historic and educational vessels to the Marina.

Browand reviewed the steps to be taken before the fee schedule would be approved by Council: (a) the Committee will consider a more detailed version of the draft fee plan at its February meeting; (b) Once the Committee has approved the proposed fee schedule RPCA anticipates that a separate public hearing on the proposal would be scheduled;

(c) RPCA might present the Marina fee proposal to the Park and Recreation Commission; and (d) the finalized fee schedule would then be submitted to City Council for approval.

Browand said that staff will provide a modified proposal at the February Committee meeting that includes both historic and non-historic educational vessels. Macek asked members to offer any proposed changes to the new fee schedule at the February meeting.

Fire Drills at the Marina

In response to a question from Pennington about fire drills conducted at the Marina, Hall said that the Alexandria Fire Department (AFD) conducts annual fire drills and ship owners regularly conduct their own fire drills.

Browand offered to investigate the possibility of AFD Chief Adam Thiel briefing the Committee about fire drills affecting the Marina.

Food Pavilion Restrooms

Macek reported he had discussed with Mark Jinks the status of actions being taken in response to the Food Pavilion's December closing. Leaseholder Realco is working to find a new tenant for the Food Pavilion site and the City is considering how to provide access to the Food Pavilion's restrooms in a manner consistent with the City's building code.

Browand offered to provide the Committee monthly updates on the status and timing of City efforts to upgrade the Food Pavilion restrooms.

Oronoco Bay Park

Browand reported that restoration of the Oronoco Bay Park Observation Deck is complete and the full walkway is now open to the public, including access to the wetland area and the walk leading to the T.C. Williams Rowing Center.

Montgomery Park Tennis Courts

In response to Van Fleet's question about why the tennis court at Montgomery Park had been closed, Browand said a small hole had developed under one of the tennis courts and staff is working with technical advisers regarding the best way to repair it.

Jones Point Park and Daingerfield Island Park

Browand reported that Jones Point's reopening is expected in June 2012 or soon after. Jones Point Park will reopen as a federal park within the City's jurisdiction within full NPS jurisdiction. NPS permission will be required for holding a City event there. Royal Street will remain closed under Wilson Bridge.

In response to Pennington's suggestion that the City encourage NPS to open up the Daingerfield Island waterfront walk to the public, Browand said that raising this with NPS would not be an RPCA responsibility. Williams reported that P&Z has, for the past two years, been meeting with NPS bimonthly and issues discussed include the Waterfront Plan's recommendation that there be continuous public waterfront access along

Daingerfield Island. Although the draft Waterfront Plan and the Waterfront Plan Work Group have both recommended that a Daingerfield Park master plan be created, NPS has told P&Z that they do not expect their next fiscal year budget to include funding for such a master plan. Williams said that P&Z will continue to raise the issue of the Daingerfield Park master plan at its bimonthly meetings with NPS. The next such meeting is planned for February.

Committee members requested that an NPS representative who can discuss both Jones Point Park and NPS' long-range plans for Daingerfield Island Park be invited to the May meeting.

Oronoco Bay Park Permits

In response to a Bernstein question about permits for small events held in Oronoco Bay Park, Lawrence said all such requests for parks should be submitted to the Office of Special Events and that information about park reservations, fees, and other details are posted on the City website. Browand said that City considers "special events" to be those that attract 500 or more attendees.

"Friends of" Groups

In response to a question about creating "Friends of" groups supporting individual parks, Browand said that staff is considering formal guidelines for creating and governing Friends groups that would consolidate guidelines for Friends groups, the Adopt-A-Park program and other similar programs.

Beachcomber

In response to a question from Fox regarding whether the City-owned Beachcomber property could be cleaned up, Williams said that, reflecting public inputs during the Waterfront Plan development process that had asked for the Beachcomber building's restoration, the City had conducted a basic cleanup of the property six months earlier. Broken windows were boarded up, trash removed from the grounds, and balconies shored up. The Plan recommends restoring the site, and this might be an early implementation item for the Waterfront Plan. Williams said that if additional maintenance issues need to be addressed P&Z can ask General Services to review it and address it.

Van Fleet said that because the Beachcomber property had been bought with \$2.5 million of City Open Space funds, the property should be sold and funds from the sale returned to the Open Space Fund. Williams said that P&Z recognizes that the funds used to purchase the Beachcomber property will eventually need to be returned to the Open Space Fund.

In response to a question from Hall about the status of plans to bring Capital Bikeshare stations to the Marina this coming summer, Williams offered to provide the Committee with an update from the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) on the Bikeshare program. Macek offered to follow up with T&ES to determine the program's status.

Report from Police Department

Torres reported several thefts in the Waterfront district, including thefts from an auto and a store, and several public drunkenness incidents and arrests. Van Fleet reported he had received numerous noise and nuisance complaints about people leaving the Union Street bars at closing time on the weekends. Torres said he would convey the information to APD. Two officers are regularly assigned to police the area on weekend evenings.

Torres reported that Chief Cook has reintroduced the Police Citizens Academy and that its new session will start on March 14 and meet twice a week for 10 weeks.

Waterfront Small Area Plan

Macek reported on the status of actions related to the Waterfront Small Area Plan (the Plan). In preparation for Council's January 21 public hearing on the Plan, staff had recommended that Council accept the Waterfront Plan Work Group (Work Group) recommendations and incorporate them into the draft Waterfront Plan. The draft Waterfront Plan had last been updated in July 2011, prior to the start of the Work Group.

Williams reported that because of time constraints a fully updated version of the Waterfront Plan would not be created prior to Council's public hearing. Instead, the P&Z staff memo, attachments, and an errata sheet reflecting changes to the draft Plan that had been recommended by the Work Group and/or made at Council's January 10 work session would be available on the City's website prior to Council's January 21 public hearing.

Williams said that the final Waterfront Plan passed by Council would include three categories of changes since the draft Plan had first been released: changes adopted in May by the Planning Commission, already incorporated in the July 2011 draft Plan; Work Group recommendations currently included in P&Z's errata sheet prepared for the upcoming Council meeting, and any additional changes approved by Council after the January 21 public hearing.

In response to a question from Van Fleet, Williams confirmed that Council would be considering a text amendment to the zoning code at its Saturday meeting.

Macek reviewed highlights of Work Group recommendations that supported positions taken by the Committee: Supporting a public plaza at the foot of King Street, opposing the use of eminent domain to acquire Waterfront property for the Plan's implementation, deemphasizing Robinson Terminal South as a site for a new Marina, incorporating the Committee's Marina Vision Statement and recommendations, implementing the parking plan right away, completing a Union Street corridor traffic management study before approving any new Waterfront development, reinvesting revenue generated by commercial activities in the Waterfront area in Waterfront improvements and maintenance, retaining and supporting existing City institutions along the Waterfront, such as the Art League and Seaport Foundation, and supporting excellence in design reflected in a Waterfront "design plan" that would provide a consistent look for signage

and public and private realm designs. Macek said that controls over Waterfront district hotels and restaurants would now be the City's strictest.

Bernstein questioned whether it was appropriate for Council to approve the Plan without having a full draft incorporating all the changes to the Plan that have been recommended by the Waterfront Plan Work Group. Williams said that the approach being followed is not unusual and that once Council approves the Plan a full revised Waterfront Plan would be created.

Bernstein suggested the City should improve the cyclone fence around the ODBC parking lot as a step to improve the appearance of the King Street/Strand area. Van Fleet said that ODBC has wanted to replace the fence with something more attractive but that the City had denied its request on the grounds that ODBC does not own this right of way.

McCall supported the Work Group's recommendation that small incremental improvements begin to be made quickly along the Waterfront as early implementation actions, including some of the elements of the History Plan. He said that AAC would be reviewing the History Plan with an eye to identifying early implementation activities.

Van Fleet said he did not think the Waterfront Plan's flood mitigation proposals would be effective and said he thought the Corps of Engineers should be invited to review the proposals. Macek said the Work Group had discussed the idea and questioned whether the nuisance flooding addressed by the Flood Mitigation Study were sufficiently significant to warrant an Army Corps of Engineers evaluation since the Corps' focus is on catastrophic flooding. Macek said the Work Group had recommended additional engineering studies be done to determine the likely effectiveness of the flood mitigation proposals.

Pennington suggested that the Committee invite T&ES to brief the Committee on the engineering studies as they progress.

In response to a question, Williams said that P&Z is focusing on two priority areas for early action: the flood mitigation engineering study and the Parking Implementation Plan. P&Z will also be pursuing the quick creation of a Parking Implementation Advisory Group to work with P&Z on next steps to be taken.

Macek reviewed additional issues raised at Council's Work Session: that the Old and Historic District (OHD) standards be applied to Robinson Terminal North development, that the Board of Architectural Review supervise Robinson Terminal North development proposals, that funds generated by commercial activities in the Waterfront district be reinvested at the Waterfront, and that a City foundation for the Waterfront be created.

Williams said that the draft Plan's language proposing that funds be made available for a civic building had been changed to recommend those funds be available for cultural uses such as a cultural area and history center along the 200 block of The Strand.

McCall asked whether the Committee might need to be modified if it were to oversee implementation of the Waterfront Plan, especially if a City foundation overseeing public-private funding were created. Macek said that the single senior City staff person responsible for coordinating all Waterfront-related activities would be the appropriate person to liaise between the City and a City foundation rather than the Committee, but agreed that future discussion of the Committee's role and membership was warranted.

Van Fleet questioned whether another public-private partnership is needed. McCall said the City currently is responsible for actions handled by public-private partnerships because City funding is not available to fund programs of interest.

Cohen said that creating a holistic Waterfront design plan, as had been recommended by the Work Group, would be an important element of the Plan to place at the outset of the Waterfront redevelopment process.

Moved by McCall and seconded by Hafer that a Committee letter to Council be drafted stating the Committee's support for adopting a Plan contingent upon certain conditions being met, including a review of the Committee's previous areas of concern and how they had been addressed by the Work Group recommendations, a review of additional actions supported by the Committee such as applying OHD design guidelines to Robinson Terminal North, creating a non-profit foundation for the Waterfront, and quantifying contributions to the public realm that may be expected from developers. Additionally, the Committee supports early implementation steps including completing a Union Street corridor traffic management plan prior to approving any new Waterfront development, developing a design plan to provide a holistic design vision for the Waterfront's public and private realm elements, and creating a public body to oversee implementation of the Plan, recognizing that the scope of the existing Waterfront Committee's responsibilities is similar to that proposed for this implementation oversight body.

The motion carried 8-3, with Bernstein, Fox and Van Fleet voting no. (Thayer was absent at the time of the vote). Macek offered to draft a letter and represent the Committee at the Council's public hearing.

Announcements

Macek announced that Council's January 21 public hearing on the Waterfront Small Area Plan will begin 9:30 am and is expected to last until at least 4:00 or 5:00 p.m.

Public Comments

Steve Muddy suggested that a bifurcated fee structure with reduced off-season fee might be considered as a way to attract ships of character year-round. He said that he is working pro bono on fundraising for Operation Sail, bringing in tall ships for this year's War of 1812 bicentennial celebration. Hall said that the City has left fundraising for this to Norfolk since they have received State funding for the celebration.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned without objection at 9:38 AM